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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001178

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ENGAGES FOREIGN SECRETARY ON BURMA;  
PHILIPPINE MEDICAL TEAM AWAITS VISAS

REF: A. MANILA 1164

[1](#)B. MANILA 1125  
[1](#)C. MANILA 1105  
[1](#)D. STATE 48651

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Post is continuing its close engagement with the Philippine government regarding the worsening humanitarian crisis in Burma, U.S. efforts in disaster relief, and coordination of international assistance. The Ambassador outlined for Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo U.S. relief efforts so far, and expressed her hope that when Romulo and his fellow ASEAN foreign ministers meet May 19 in Singapore, they can find a way to persuade the Burmese regime to accept more international aid. However, an experienced Philippine government medical assistance team continues to await permission from Burmese authorities to enter the country and begin work. Philippine media reports highlight the toll in human suffering, and continued stonewalling by the junta on allowing in adequate international aid. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador spoke May 14 with Foreign Minister Alberto Romulo on Burma, describing how U.S. C-130 airlifts this week have been able to provide tons of desperately needed disaster-relief supplies, and how U.S. assets already in place in neighboring Thailand for the annual "Cobra Gold" military exercise can be made available on short notice. She briefed Romulo on the May 14 consultations in Manila of PACOM commander Admiral Timothy Keating, who briefed the newly-designated Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff, General Alexander Yano, on his surprise visit to Burma along with USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore on the first U.S. C-130 airlift on May 12. The Ambassador underscored to Secretary Romulo deep U.S. concern at the lack of visas for our DART disaster response team, which seriously hinders our ability to ascertain whether relief supplies are actually reaching storm victims. Responding to the Foreign Secretary's statement that he would travel to Singapore for a May 19 meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers on Burma, the Ambassador expressed hope that ASEAN can press Burma to open its doors to international relief workers. Romulo said he hoped ASEAN could use its collective voice to push Burma in the right direction.

[1](#)3. (C) Director Raymond Balatbat of the Department of Foreign Affairs, ASEAN Affairs Division confirmed May 13 that Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo would travel to Singapore for a May 19 meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers, who will discuss Burma relief efforts. Romulo will be accompanied by Undersecretary for Policy Enrique Manalo, Assistant Secretary for Asia-Pacific Affairs Romeo Manalo, and Balatbat. When asked why action had not been taken more quickly by ASEAN, Balatbat responded that scheduling and logistical

difficulties had precluded an earlier meeting of the relevant officials.

14. (SBU) According to Dr. Ariel Rivera, chief of the Philippine medical mission being dispatched to Burma, the Burmese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not yet granted a travel permit to the medical team. Although the DFA remains in close communication with the Burmese Embassy in Manila, there is no indication how soon the team will be permitted to travel. Dr. Rivera indicated that his team will work only in the Rangoon area, and that after assessing the situation on the ground, it will provide recommendations to Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo regarding additional assistance.

15. (C) Per reftel D, Embassy continues to engage Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) counterparts regarding U.S. efforts to provide assistance to Burmese cyclone victims, and the United States' grave concerns over the broadening humanitarian crisis there. Post on May 13 discussed U.S. airlifts of disaster-relief supplies with working-level contacts in the DFA Offices of American Affairs, UN/International Organizations, and ASEAN Affairs.

16. (SBU) Philippine media continue to focus on the suffering of the Burmese people and the intransigence of the ruling junta in not allowing greater access to Burma by international relief organizations. Front-page articles and editorials in the leading-dailies Philippine Star and Philippine Daily Inquirer have highlighted how Burmese authorities' rejection of the United States' enormous disaster-relief capabilities would result in needless suffering and death. Even in the far north of the

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Philippines, DCM was asked about Burma and U.S. relief efforts in a live radio interview, which DCM used to describe U.S. and international efforts to help the people of Burma, despite obstacles from the regime.  
KENNEY